

**Leaday Crossing**

Spanning the Colorado River at the crossing of Farm/Ranch Road 2134,  
0.8 miles south-southwest of Leaday Townsite

Voss vicinity

Coleman and Concho Counties

Texas

HAER No. TX-20

HAER

TEX.

42-VOS.V,

5-

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

**FIELD RECORDS**

Historic American engineering Record  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Leaday Crossing

HAER No. TX-20

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Location: Spanning the Colorado River, at the crossing of Farm/Ranch Road 2134, 0.8 miles south-southwest of Leaday townsite, Voss vicinity, boundary of Coleman and Concho counties, Texas

UTM: 14.435697.3491273  
Quad: Leaday

Date of Construction: circa 1936-1941

Present Owner: Colorado River Municipal Water District

Present Use: Vehicular and pedestrian bridge over the Colorado River

Significance: Located near the site of Trap Crossing, an old and much-traveled crossing of the Colorado River on the road from Coleman City to Fort Concho to the south, this bridge was the last of a long series of crossings at this general location. It was constructed during the Depression as a Civilian Conservation Corps project in response to the consolidation of area ranch schools and a resulting Works Progress Administration-sponsored road and bridge project constructed across the adjoining Day-Padgitt and Day-Miller ranches.

Historian: Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University, October 1989

## I. HISTORY

### A. An Overview of Historical Context

*For the general historical overview which places the property in the context of the development of cattle ranching at the confluence of the Colorado and Concho rivers, please see HABS No. TX-3350.*

### B. Leaday Crossing in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: The Old "Trap Crossing"

The Leaday Crossing occupies land set aside in the 1840s for the school revenues of Brazoria and Fort Bend counties and was under the directorship of the school commissioners for those counties. [1] It was for many years populated by roving bands of Indian and occasional groups of cattle drivers. The first permanent settler in the vicinity was Rich Coffey, who established himself in 1862 between the present-day towns of Voss and Leaday (see HABS No. TX-3362). In 1869, Coffey relocated to another site in the vicinity, about two-and-one-half miles to the west of Leaday Crossing, at the confluence of the Concho and Colorado rivers. This second Coffey settlement, a small compound fortified against the Indians, became the family's permanent homestead and has continued in the ownership of Coffey descendants (see HABS No. TX-3354). [2]

Other settlers soon followed Coffey into the area, following the practice in this part of the state of open range cattle grazing. In 1878, ranching entrepreneur William H. Day purchased from the Fort Bend and Brazoria County school commissioners a very large which included the Coleman County side of the Leaday Crossing site. Day's new lands spread to the north, east and south for several thousand acres. [3] Day had concluded that open range grazing was no longer viable and that in the future ranchers would have to own their grazing lands and would be compelled to fence those lands. When Day moved onto his Coleman County lands, he immediately began fencing a large tract, which became the locally famous Red Wire Pasture. This act precipitated wire-cutting and range wars in the early 1880s. Day died in 1881, and his wide-ranged plans for the Day Ranch were drastically curtailed by debt. His widow, Mabel Doss Day, began arrangements to refinance the ranch and to consolidate the operations of the ranch, earning a reputation for intelligent management which gained her a great deal of celebrity, both locally and throughout the Texas cattle ranching region. [4]

Early pioneers, such as Rich Coffey and his neighboring ranchers who had begun to settle in the area in the late 1860s and 1870s, had established a convenient cattle crossing of the Colorado river, about one mile northwest of present Leaday Crossing and about two miles south of the first Day Ranch headquarters. A store was established on a bluff on the Concho County side of this crossing and was called The Trap, and the place itself took on the name of Trap Crossing. [5] A post office called "Rich Coffey, Texas" was located in the Trap store. Another store was located on the opposite bank of the river called The Trigger. Both the Trap and Trigger stores were washed away in the great flood of 1882. Subsequently, the crossing changed locations several times, always located within a radius of a mile from the original site.

The crossing was situated at a place very near its original location in 1904, when Mabel Day, now Mrs. J. C. Lea, laid out a new town (see HABS No. TX-3362) on the Day Ranch, about one mile east of the crossing. [6] The town was called Leaday and was to serve the future homesteaders of tenant farms being laid out in a subdivision of the Day Ranch. Also at this time, Mabel Day Lea began construction of a new headquarters house on the edge of a bluff over the river about two miles east of Trap Crossing (see HABS No. TX-3351). These projects were continued after her death by her

daughter and heir, Mrs. Tom Padgitt, and by the purchasers of a large portion of the ranch, the Miller family of Belton. Together, the Padgitts and Millers, proprietors of the reapportioned Day Ranch, now called the Day-Padgitt and Day-Miller ranches, respectively, transformed the community into a thickly-populated tenant farming community with at its hub the bustling little town of Leaday. [7]

The town of Leaday was shortlived. The land, suitable for cattle grazing, could not support subsistence farming, and bad cotton markets in the 1920s and the effects of the Depression gradually depleted the local tenant farming population. Leaday reflected these changes in the surrounding countryside and began to fade away in the late 1920s and 1930s. By the end of World War II, Leaday had a much reduced population, which would continue to dwindle. [8]

### C. The Depression and the Construction of the Crossing

The Depression had its first real impact in Coleman County during the drought year of 1930. [9] Two Coleman City banks failed in 1931. That same year, some federal farm relief was appropriated through agricultural loans. Beginning in 1932, various government agencies made Coleman allocations to pay the unemployed for labor on projects, including school repairs, city street and county road improvements, city water system extensions, dam constructions, construction of canneries in Coleman and Santa Anna, school lunchrooms for the county schools, and National Youth Administration project, which included the construction of an auditorium-museum in the Texas Ranger Park at Santa Anna. Relief projects occupied many Coleman County residents for a decade, from 1932 to 1942.

The Works Progress Administration construction projects, which most effected the vicinity of the confluence, were related to the consolidation of the schools and the transport of the students along new or improved ranch roads. As part of the various relief program, the Mozelle school district, located three miles east of Leaday, was granted funds toward the construction of a high school building, and the schools on the Day-Padgitt and Day-Miller ranches were consolidated with Mozelle in the 1936-1937 school year. [10] Children, who therefore had walked to the numerous little schools which had been dotted across the ranches, were now driven in school buses across new roads or old ranch roads improved with a series of new bridges. In 1937, a total of one hundred miles of Coleman County farm-to-market roads were constructed or improved, including the Leaday-hill Road, known locally as the Elm Creek Road, which runs across the Red Wire Pasture on the Day-Miller Ranch. [11] It was in this period that the road improvements included the construction of a series of new WPA bridges along this road. [12]

As a response to these various road improvements--they, in turn, were in response to the consolidation of the schools and the appearance in the area for the first time of large numbers of automobiles--that the present-day crossing bridge was built. The new location was about one mile to the east of the original Trap Crossing and less than a mile south of the little town of Leaday, and it became the new crossing for the road which now connected the town of Voss to the north with Millersville to the south, present-day Farm/Ranch Road #2134. The new stone and concrete bridge was a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) project, constructed by a crew headquartered at a CCC camp located west of Coleman. [13] The bridge was named Leaday Crossing.

*For related material regarding the consolidation of the schools and a discussion of the dynamite storage shed used during the construction of the bridges, see HABS No. TX-3353, Leaday school, and HABS No. TX-3360, W.P.A. Dynamite Storage Facility. The Elm Creek Road bridges included in this survey are HAER Nos. TX-16, TX-17, and TX-18.*

## II. THE CROSSING BRIDGE

### A. Description

The stone and concrete bridge is approximately 320 feet long and 28 feet wide, with a width of 22 feet of clear traffic space between the low concrete guard rails. For a span of approximately 108 feet in the center of the bridge, the roadway span is supported by a long series of parallel and continuous concrete piers spaced at approximately 9-foot spans. The widening abutments at either end of the bridge are concrete on fill and covered with a skin of local limestone flagging. The same treatment is given to culvert abutments to either side.

### B. Subsequent History, Condition, and Future of the Site

in 1979, the Texas Water Commission granted permission to the Colorado River Municipal Water District, an entity based in Big Spring, to construct a large dam on the Colorado River. The site was chosen was a location several miles downstream from Leaday, 16 miles below the confluence of the Colorado and Concho rivers. Early in the planning stages, a program was developed to address environmental concerns, including the impact of the proposed flood area on prehistoric and historic cultural resources. In 1980-1981, a survey of historic cultural resources was conducted by Freeman and Freeman, under contract to Espey, Huston and Associates, a firm of Austin environmental consultants. Subsequently, a number of other studies and amplifications of previous studies have been conducted. In early 1988, an Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm of environmental scientists, Mariah Associates, Inc., began further assessment of the area of the flood plain, including various archaeological investigations and assessments. Mariah has also acted in the role of coordinator of related projects, including this project--the recordation of nineteen endangered historic sites in the confluence area for the Historic American buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record. The sites were selected from a list compiled under the guidance of the Texas Historical Commission.

Construction was finished on the dam in the late summer of 1989. Called the Stacy Dam and Reservoir, the project will inundate approximately 19,200 acres, and the threat to Leaday Crossing is probable in the near future. The bridge has remained in excellent repair and in daily use as the principle crossing of the Colorado River in the vicinity of the confluence. It also has been for many years a favorite fishing spot.

## III. ENDNOTES

- [1] Donald R. Abbe and Joseph E. King, "A Preliminary Report: Historical Resources within the Stacy Dam Project Area," draft of a report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Mariah Associates, Inc., Environmental Consultants (Lubbock, Texas, June 1989), 34.
- [2] For a concise history of the Coffey Ranch, see Martha Doty Freeman and Joe C. Freeman, A Cultural Resource Inventory of the Proposed Stacy Reservoir; Concho, Coleman and Runnels Counties, Texas, vol. II; Historic Cultural Resources, report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Espey, Huston And Associates, Inc., Engineering and Environmental Consultants (Austin, Texas, March 1981), 3-4 through 11. Hazie Davis Lefevre, Concho County History 1858-1958 (Eden, Texas, March 1959), 37.

- [3] Reference is to Coleman County Courthouse, Deed Record, vol. B, pp. 572 and 573; Fort Bend School Lands to William H. Day, April 9, 1878.
- [4] For a concise history of the activities of William H. Day in the formation of the cattle industry in Texas following the Civil War, see James Padgitt, 44-48. For fuller historical information on William and Mabel Doss Day and for the documentation of the deeds of trust and the sequence of original and subsequent owners of the Day Ranch, see HABS Nos. TX-3351 and 3362. This period (1889-1906) in the life of Mabel Doss Day Lea and the fate of the Day Ranch in these years is best covered in Freeman, 4-9 through 4-11 and 6-1 through 6-7.
- [5] For more information on the Trap Crossing, see Glen Wilson's essay, "Leaday," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, A History of Coleman County and Its People, vol. I., San Angelo, Texas: Anchor Publishing Company, 1985), 268-269.
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] Freeman, 4-9 through 4-11.
- [8] Ibid., 6-1 through 6-7.
- [9] For a discussion of the various Coleman County relief organizations active during these years, see Glynn Mitchell's essay, "The Depression," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, vol. I., 77-80.
- [10] For a discussion of the early schools in the Leaday vicinity, see Ralph Terry's essay, "Leaday Schools," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, A History of Coleman County and Its People (San Angelo, Texas: Anchor Publishing Company, 1985), vol. I., 152.
- [11] Mitchell, 78.
- [12] A thorough search was made in all records kept at the Coleman County Courthouse for further information regarding the actual construction of the bridges, particularly in the Commissioners' Minutes and the Contracts volumes for the entire period 1936-1941, but nothing directly associated with the bridge projects was found.
- [13] Coleman County Courthouse, Commissioners' Court Minutes, vol. M. 293, January 8, 1940; a request to construct a CCC camp one mile west of Coleman.

#### IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by Mariah Associates, Inc., archaeologists; recorded under the direction of Greg Kendrick, HABS regional coordinator, Denver. The project was completed during the summer of 1989 at the project field office at Houston and College Station, Texas. Project supervisor was Graham B. Luhn, AIA, architect; project architectural historian was Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University; intern architects were Debbie Fernandez and Paul Neidinger; student architects were Brian Dougan, Robert Holton, Janna Johnson, Wayne Jones, and Pat Sparks, Texas A&M University; project photographer was Paul Neidinger, photographic processing by Laura McFarlane.